

NEWS

RESTAURATEUR AIMING FOR UNCOMMON SUCCESS

SUBMITTED BY [PAUL HALLORAN](#) | January 3, 2020



Uncommon Feasts owner Michelle Mulford and restaurant employee Paula Agganis prepare food in their Lydia Pinkham building location. (Paul Halloran)

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If you cook it, they will come – and hopefully stay around to enjoy the ambience.

That philosophy is what prompted Michelle Mulford to parlay her catering business – which she moved to the Lydia Pinkham building last May – into a restaurant that offers breakfast, lunch and dinner five days a week.

“We originally planned to have occasional meals,” said Mulford, who opened the catering business in Boston nine years ago. “We weren’t sure how it would take off, but people in the building have been very supportive and we have been getting more and more people coming in from outside the building.”

The wide open, 2100-square-foot space is certainly conducive to interaction among diners. Uncommon Feasts, which is open Tuesday through Saturday, features a “French and Italian influence” to the entrees, while also offering soups, salads and homemade ice cream.

The hallmark of the restaurant, Mulford said, is that she uses locally grown food as much as possible and everything that is served is made on site. In 2020 she plans to focus more on dinners in the restaurant and launch a lunch delivery service.

If Mulford had any doubts that her idea was a good one, they were eliminated by two incidents on the same day in December. In the morning, a customer asked if the community was embracing the business. Mulford assured the woman that is absolutely the case, to which she replied, “Good, because we need you to be here.”

At the end of the day, a young artist from RAW Art Works came in to ask if he could use the space to do a film shoot. Mulford couldn’t say yes fast enough.

“We wanted to create a community space where people could get really good food and spend some time with one another,” Mulford said. “That is absolutely happening. With dinners, our goal is not to have people racing out of here.”

Mulford’s move to Lynn was borne out of a need for commercial kitchen space for the catering business. One Mighty Mill owner John Olinto suggested she look at the Pinkham building, and when she did, she knew it was “perfect.”

She did need some help with funding, however, and that is where the city came in. Mulford received a \$120,000 loan from the Lynn Municipal Finance Corporation, through Lynn Economic Development & Industrial Corporation (EDIC/Lynn), allowing her to make renovations to the space and cover other expenses associated with opening the location.

“EDIC made it possible,” she said. “They’ve been with me every step of the way. As I grow and meet new challenges, I’m able to talk to them and get counsel. They have been enormously helpful.”

“We believe 100 percent in Michelle and we’re proud to help make her dream become a reality,” said EDIC/Lynn Executive Director James M. Cowdell.

Mulford started her culinary career by cooking in restaurants in Boston and the Berkshires. She opened the catering business – also called Uncommon Feasts – and gradually grew it to the point where she needed a commercial kitchen. With the restaurant now operating, she has 6-8 employees, all from Lynn, including a few fellow Lydia Pinkham tenants.

“I knew Lynn was a very welcoming community that was open to new businesses,” she said. “With me, it has always been about community and that is what is so inspiring about Lynn. It has embraced what I’m building here.”

Mulford has poured her heart and soul – and sweat – into the burgeoning business. Pointing to a sofa near the entrance to the restaurant, she said “I have slept on this couch, but that’s OK; it’s worth it.”

Her increasing number of loyal patrons would agree.